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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ABU DHABI 002143

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STATE FOR G/TIP, NEA/RA, AND NEA/ARPI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2010

TAGS: PHUM ELAB TC

SUBJECT: RESPONDING TO CROWN PRINCE'S LETTER ON CAMEL
JOCKEYS

REF: 4/28/05 LETTER FROM ABU DHABI CROWN PRINCE

SHEIKH MOHAMMED BIN ZAYED TO THE SECRETARY

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The UAE has taken several positive actions since March 31 to address Trafficking in Persons related to child camel jockeys. These achievements generally track with those noted in Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed's (MbZ) April 28 letter to the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and NEA PDAS Cheney, though the letter was

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incomplete on some points and overstates others. The achievements include:

- passage of three ministerial decrees imposing age and weight limits, requiring camel owners to turn in children in their custody before May 31, and requiring individual passports for all children working on farms;

- repatriation of about 100 children;

- prosecution of two TIP cases involving four children;

- an agreement with UNICEF for screening, caring for, and repatriating, 3,000 children and allocation of funding to implement UNICEF's action plan;

- opening of a new Social Support Center office building for UNICEF and Interior Ministry social workers who would care for camel jockeys;

- creation of a Special Committee on Camel Racing within the Ministry of Interior to oversee UAEG efforts to combat trafficking of young boys as camel jockeys;

- formation of an anti-TIP unit within the Ministry of Interior to enforce the decrees; and

- designation of a new, improved shelter facility that will offer better access to social workers and UNICEF project employees.

12. (C) Summary continued: The UAEG's political commitment to ending this form of trafficking has never been so apparent, and it is now time for implementation. We have included several recommended follow-up actions for the UAEG in para 4 that the Department could include in replying to Sheikh Mohammed. End Summary.

13. (C) Sheikh Mohammed's letter provides a broad overview of the measures the UAE Government has begun to implement, or intends to implement, to address the Trafficking in Persons problem related to camel jockeys. To assist the Department in responding to Sheikh Mohammed, Ambassador followed up by requesting more detailed information from MbZ staffer Yousef Al Otaiba to back up some of the statements made in the letter (responses faxed to NEA/ARPI). During a May 7 meeting, Ambassador also was able to secure Interior Minister Sheikh Saif's consent to allow visiting G/TIP Reports Officer Feleke Assefa full access to appropriate officials responsible for TIP issues, and to facilities related to the camel jockey rescue effort, so that we could obtain essential information.

Recommended Points for Response to MbZ:

14. (C) The UAEG has taken several positive steps to combat this particular trafficking issue. Based on private and public statements, and the actions described in this cable, the country's leadership appears determined to eliminate the problem. In responding to Sheikh Mohammed, the Department could:

- Acknowledge the excellent progress that the UAEG is making to prevent further trafficking of camel jockeys;

- Commend the UAEG for working with UNICEF and the

International Organization for Migration (IOM) to protect and repatriate the boys and urge the UAE to step up the protection of child trafficking victims by rescuing significantly more children than those who have been rescued to date;

-- Encourage the UAEG to increase the number of prosecutions related to the trafficking of children as camel jockeys;

-- Encourage the UAEG to document and publicize its action.

Prosecutions

15. (C) The statement in Sheikh Mohammed's letter that prosecution under the law has been assigned the highest priority by the internal police is borne out by public and private statements by Interior Ministry officials. Moreover, the Ministry of Interior has formed a Special Committee on Camel Racing (with representatives from Interior in Abu Dhabi and the Dubai Police Human Rights Care Department) to oversee UAEG efforts to combat trafficking of young boys as camel jockeys.

16. (C) A subsequent assertion in the letter that the UAE has identified, arrested and prosecuted numerous traffickers in human immigrants, including racetrack managers, trainers, and other so-called "middlemen", and that enforcement is strict and prosecution is vigorous, appears to be an overstatement. The Ministry of Interior informed us May 8 that the Government is prosecuting two cases involving four children. These cases have emerged since March 31, and we have requested more details about them, but it is difficult to see how they could involve prosecution of racetrack managers or trainers, given that the 60-day "grace period" for the new decree is still in effect. The UAE has formed a 70-person anti-TIP unit within the Ministry of Interior to enforce the decrees to rescue children after the May 31 deadline. In our discussions with the Ministry of Interior spokesman and UNICEF, everyone agreed that the number of arrests and prosecutions would most likely increase appreciably after the May 31 deadline for camel owners to turn in children in their custody. The 70-person unit will also monitor camel races and farms, investigate age and weight limits, beginning with the racing season in October. The UAE Camel Racing Federation will reform racing rules, including using older camels and shortening race distances.

Rescues

17. (C) Sheikh Mohammed is correct in asserting that the UAE has rescued "scores of child camel jockeys." UAEG statistics indicate that 203 boys have been rescued and are now in various stages of the repatriation pipeline: living in the temporary camel jockey rehabilitation center at the Zayed Military City army base (65-70 on any given day); awaiting deportation after their relatives or sponsors with whom they live on the farms pledged to repatriate them (approximately 30); or back in their home countries after being repatriated (approximately 100). The majority of the children in each of these categories are Pakistanis. The remainder are from Sudan, Bangladesh, Mauritania, Eritrea, India, Afghanistan, and Somalia, according to various Ministry of Interior figures provided to us and to the press. (Note: The Indian Embassy issued a statement May 10 denying that any of the underage camel jockeys were from India, and noting that the last case that came to its attention was in May 1997.) Those who have been repatriated traveled with their parents or their caretakers. According to the Interior Ministry, 45 percent of child camel jockeys were brought to the UAE by people claiming to be uncles, 30 percent by maternal cousins, and 9 percent by their parents' friends. Thus, the large majority of these camel jockeys live with their families in the UAE, and most of them live on camel farms. (Note: The UAEG believes that its decision in 2002 to use DNA tests to determine the parenthood of camel jockeys has helped reduce the number of children brought in the country without their parents.)

18. (C) Estimates of the total number of underage camel jockeys vary widely. Sheikh Saif told Ambassador May 7 that the UAEG's latest estimate is between 1,500 and 3,000. Pakistani TIP activist Ansar Burney has claimed that there are as many as 6,000 to 8,000 foreign boys working on camel farms in the UAE. With UNICEF's assistance, the Ministry of Interior will conduct a comprehensive screening of children in camel farms to clarify the discrepancies in the estimates, and help locate the extended families of these children, or the tribes to which they belong. By the end of May, the Ministry of Interior says it will have an accurate register of the number of children from every country and the status of each of them.

International Cooperation

19. (C) The May 8 signing of a joint Ministry of Interior-UNICEF project agreement for repatriating 3,000 children, and the UAE's allocation of funding for an action plan to be drafted by UNICEF, are significant recent developments. The agreement was the result of May 7-8 Interior Ministry consultations with UNICEF representatives from the source countries, representatives from credible NGOs in those countries, and representatives from local governments in source provinces. At a press conference May 9, UNICEF Representative for the Gulf, June Kunugi, congratulated the UAEG for the "very positive initiative" and pledged to work together to rescue, rehabilitate, and return the children to their home countries. While Sheikh Mohammed's letter was written 10 days before this agreement was signed, the UAE had been developing a working relationship with UNICEF and IOM for several weeks to address the identification, care, and humane repatriation of the boys. Under the new agreement, UNICEF will have an action plan by the week of May 21 that will contain:

- a screening procedure to identify child victims;
- a registration and record-keeping procedures for establishing identities (age, nationality, family contacts, employment, etc);
- a reunification procedure for locating parents (or family members) and reuniting child victims in source countries;
- a means to identify alternative homes (shelters) for those whose parents or relatives can't be identified;
- rehabilitation programs in source countries.

10. (C) The approximately 70 children currently in UAEG shelters would be repatriated first, as a pilot project using procedures above. IOM would assist UNICEF in victim identification, repatriation and reintegration efforts. Local NGOs are being identified to serve as implementation partners. The program will assist children in providing reintegration assistance for up to 2 years. At UAEG expense, the children will be repatriated and sheltered in centers identified and accepted by UNICEF, in cities or towns of origin, which will facilitate their integration with their local communities. The UNICEF agreement includes education and training in home countries.

Care and Repatriation of Victims

11. (C) Sheikh Mohammed's letter accurately notes that some rehabilitation programs have already commenced. The Ministry of Interior has opened a new Social Support Center in Abu Dhabi that provides counseling and other services to the young boys. The Ministry of Interior has also designated a new shelter (with a capacity of 100) adjacent to the juvenile detention center in Abu Dhabi's Al Mafrag suburb. Like the shelter on the army base that it will replace, the new shelter is primarily for those children without adult relatives living in the UAE. Interior Minister Sheikh Saif told the Ambassador May 7 that the boys who live with their families on the camel farms, who constitute a large majority of camel jockeys, are not going to be separated from their relatives. Consequently, the numbers of children at the shelter are not going to rise significantly. However, their families are being asked to sign documents promising to take the children out of the UAE by the end of May, or risk legal action.

12. (C) In a matter of days, the Ministry of Interior will transfer the children living at the shelter on the army base to the new shelter. This new shelter is outside the incarceration/detention area, has better facilities than the current shelter at the Zayed Military City (army base), and will offer better access to social workers and UNICEF project employees. The shelter on the army base was co-located with a medical clinic and hospital with operating rooms and intensive care units. Children at the new shelter will have access to the medical clinic and recreation facilities, including swimming pool and soccer field, at the juvenile detention center, but every effort will be made to keep the two populations segregated. The new shelter also has classrooms where the children can receive a basic education. The shelter on the army base would still be available to accommodate any surge of rescued children after the May 31 deadline.

Camel Jockey Law

13. (C) Sheikh Mohammed's assertion that the UAE Government has "passed" a federal law on April 1 banning underage racing jockeys is not entirely accurate. On March 31, the UAEG began implementing three new decrees enforcing the principal features of the law (imposing age and weight limits,

requiring camel owners to turn in children in their custody before May 31, and requiring individual passports for all children working in farms). The law itself has not yet been officially gazetted and Interior Ministry sources say that this may not occur for several months. Nonetheless, everyone we have asked, including source country embassies, UNICEF and International Organization for Migration representatives, and officials at the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs believe that the UAE leadership is fully engaged and committed to combating this form of trafficking, as Sheikh Mohammed stated in his letter.

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